

Rusk Will Confront His Senate Critics On Vietnam Today

By PETER GROSE

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WASHINGTON, March 10—Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Senatorial critics of American policy on the Vietnam war meet tomorrow for a long-awaited public confrontation just as the Administration is reviewing a set of basic questions about the future of the war effort.

Crosscurrents of domestic politics and military strategy have carried President Johnson and his top advisers to a point of crucial policy determination.

Mr. Rusk's appearance marks the first time in more than two years that he has agreed to testify publicly on Vietnam policy before the largely critical Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Political analysts regard it as more than coincidence that the hearing falls on the eve of the New Hampshire Presidential primary.

The results of that vote could have a significant effect

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on pending decisions about the war. In challenging President Johnson, Senator Eugene J. McCarthy, the Minnesota Democrat, has built his campaign on opposition to the graduated escalations that have dominated United States policy in Vietnam for the last three years.

Another potentially significant factor in the current policy review was the result of a Gallup Poll released yesterday, indicating that 49 per cent of Americans believe that the United States made a mistake in sending troops to fight in Vietnam.

Under consideration now is a request from Gen. William C. Westmoreland, commander of United States forces in Vietnam, for 206,000 more troops, above the current authorized level of 525,000.

Denies 'Specific Request'

Asked about this request, reported in this morning's New York Times, the White House press secretary, George Christian, said that 206,000 was one of the figures "kicking around." But he denied that President Johnson had received any "specific request."

Leading Administration policy makers are known to be deeply divided about whether American strength should be augmented to that extent.

Even if further national polls and the vote in New Hampshire on Tuesday should indicate strong popular sentiment against new escalation, there would be political danger from another direction—in refusing the American commander in the field the manpower and resources he determines necessary to prosecute the war.

Up to now, the Administration has inclined to send General Westmoreland whatever he has requested.

May Reply in General

Mr. Rusk is expected to avoid being drawn into discussions of troop levels and future military strategy when he appears before Sen. J. W. Fulbright, Arkansas Democrat who is chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and other Senatorial doves.

But he has indicated he will answer general questions about Vietnam policy, even though the formal reason for his appearance is to support the Administration's foreign aid bill. It was when he testified on foreign aid on Feb. 18, 1966, that he got into a bitter argument with committee members about war policy.

The strategical arguments in the current policy review stem from the wide enemy offensive against the cities of South Vietnam over Tet, the Lunar New Year, six weeks ago.

A strong faction of State Department officials and civilians of the Pentagon argue that this show of strength deeply altered American strategical calculations. Many are outspoken in their opposition to the further escalations proposed by General Westmoreland and endorsed, at least in general, by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Some go further to argue that basic goals of the American effort should now be revised downward. A typical expression of this view came from one State Department official who said:

"Our initial reaction to the Tet offensive was governed by reflex—claim victory, call it an enemy failure. Then the information began coming in, the real situation became apparent.

"Now we can either work to rebuild those old illusions, as Westy seems to want, or else recognize that we have a new reality and adjust our goals accordingly."

Television Coverage

Channel 4 plans live coverage of Secretary Rusk's testimony today, beginning at 10 A.M. and lasting for the duration of his appearance. Channel 13 will present a taped summary beginning at 10 P.M. followed by a panel discussion. Channel 2 will present a special report at either 9 P.M. or 10 P.M. and will cover testimony live if warranted.